Gartner CIO
Leadership Forum
23 – 24 March 2026

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2026 Executive Summary

A message from the Conference Chair

Do you feel empowered to thrive in an environment where technology and business priorities are evolving rapidly, and leaders must continually adapt to drive growth and resilience amid complexity and change? We look forward to working with you as you sharpen your skills in technology leadership, executive partnership, and professional growth, and hope to see you at Gartner IT Symposium/Xpo 2026.

Sincerely,

Peter Skyttegaard
Conference Chair & Sr Director Analyst, Gartner

Top Takeaways

1 Turn AI hype into P&L reality

In 2026, CEOs have expanded the definition of value, demanding not just ROI but visible competitive advantage, cost compression, and faster time to market. Gartner data shows you can meet these expectations by implementing the proven "Sure Bets" of AI and adopting the elite "Practices of the Best," which consistently generate the enterprise value CEOs are looking for.

"Chasing the 'perfect' use case is a distraction. Scaling AI isn't about making big bets; it's about lowering the barriers to making 1,000 small ones."

Nate Suda,
Sr Director Analyst,
Gartner

2 Architect for agentic AI at enterprise scale

AI agents represent a step change in how work is executed and scaled. Prepare data, applications, and services to be agent-ready while co-leading change across the C-suite to baseline. Measure business outcomes, create financial visibility, evolve liability and risk models, and intentionally develop the human + machine relationship. You cannot do this alone.

"Agents are a new workforce. Govern them like one."

Rajesh Kandaswamy,
Distinguished VP Analyst,
Gartner

3 Reinvent operating models for the AI age and extreme volatility

AI and extreme volatility are pushing the IT operating model and enterprise operating model closer together. IT organizations will increasingly be augmented and partially autonomously operated by AI. You must define which roles evolve, which disappear, and where human judgment remains essential. The path to autonomous business requires deliberate operating model redesign, not incremental optimization.

"The future of IT is a design choice, not an inevitability."

Hung LeHong,
Distinguished VP Analyst,
Gartner

4 Make performance legible from the T-suite to the C-suite

Manage performance downward and communicate value upward using different but connected metrics. Translating IT and AI outcomes into financial terms, supported by business and human value stories, is essential to sustaining executive confidence and investment.

"If executives cannot see value clearly, they will not fund it consistently."

Galliopi Demetriou,
VP Analyst,
Gartner

5 Institutionalize strategic cost optimization

Cost optimization must evolve from episodic cuts to a continuous, strategic discipline. You should proactively optimize technology spend, improve unit economics, and reinvest savings to fuel growth, while managing emerging AI and GenAI contract risks.

"Cost discipline is how CIOs create room to innovate."

Bryan Hayes,
Sr Director Analyst,
Gartner

6 Modernize cyber for an AI world and master board moments

AI changes both the threat landscape and the tools available to defend against it. Define a realistic 2030 cyber vision and be prepared to lead six decisive board conversations where credibility, judgment, and resilience matter most.

"Cyber leadership is tested in moments, not models."

Paul Proctor,
Distinguished VP Analyst,
Gartner

7 Lead workforce evolution, not just headcount reduction

Boards are asking how AI should change the workforce. High-performing CIOs lead a proactive conversation focused on role redesign, skills adjacency, and long-term value creation, while measuring AI learning programs by business outcomes rather than completion rates.

"Workforce strategy is about value creation, not cost headlines."

Nate Suda,
Sr Director Analyst,
Gartner

8 Accelerate change by targeting behavioral hot spots

Transformation stalls when human resistance is ignored. GenAI can help you anticipate behavioral barriers, personalize engagement, and deliver quick wins, while preserving humanity in customer and employee experiences.

"Change accelerates when it feels safer and simpler."

Matt Hancocks,
Sr Director Analyst,
Gartner

9 Build executive endurance and co-leadership structures

Sustained volatility demands executive endurance. Strengthen C-suite relationships, distribute technology ownership beyond IT, and establish co-leadership models that support innovation while maintaining coherence.

"Endurance is the hidden advantage of modern CIOs."

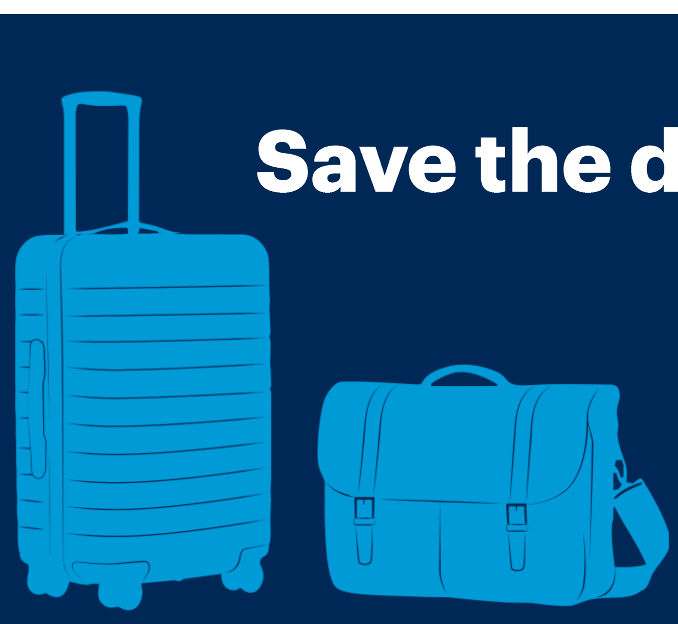
Rob O'Donohue,
VP Analyst,
Gartner

10 De-risk innovation with disciplined technology evaluation

You should time experiments around adoption constraints, not enthusiasm. By enforcing disciplined evaluation, you will reduce risk, increase the return on innovation, and—especially in regulated or public-sector environments where measurable AI impact is required—ensure initiatives meet compliance and accountability standards.

"Run the right experiment at the right time."

Samantha Searle,
Director Analyst,
Gartner



Save the date!

We hope to see you at Gartner CIO Leadership Forum 2027!

Join us 2 – 3 March in Vienna, Austria or 15 - 16 March in London, U.K.

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